

News Release

With State Funding Secured Through Legislative Bonding Bill, U of M Crookston Wellness Center Project Looks to Next Steps

By asvec on Wednesday, May 28, 2014

Although most students and many faculty and staff are off for the summer, there was still significant celebration on the campus of the University of Minnesota Crookston recently when Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton signed the 2014 Legislative Bonding Bill. The bill included state funding for several projects for the University of Minnesota system, one of which was a \$10 million allocation for a Wellness Center at the Crookston campus.

Chancellor Fred Wood sees the facility as vital to the future of UMC. He said, "The addition of the Wellness Center at the University of Minnesota Crookston will be nothing short of transformational. Not only will the facility be an important recruiting tool, but it also will improve the overall student experience by building community among our students and serving as a gathering place that promotes healthy activities indoors when it's impossible to exercise outdoors." Wood said, "I think, as a campus, we were able to show the shortcomings of our existing facilities to state legislators who visited over the past year. And with the assistance of many individuals--not the least of whom were our student leaders--we were able to help everyone understand just how important this project is for student life as well as for retention and recruitment of new students." Wood added, "We especially want to thank Senator LeRoy Stumpf, who was instrumental to this process, and Representative Debra Kiel. We appreciate their advocacy and support of this project." Wood also acknowledged the work done by Chancellor Emeritus Charles Casey and his wife Barbara Muesing. "Chancellor Casey did a great deal of work to set the stage for this important project," said Wood, "and Barbara Muesing voiced her support whenever she had an opportunity. They deserve a share in the credit."

Next Steps

While a limited amount of pre-planning for the Wellness Center took place over the past year as the project was added to the priority list for the University of Minnesota system, the next major step will be to refine and finalize the official plans. That can now move forward full throttle. Initial site studies suggest the best plan of action would be to construct the building adjacent to and west of the existing UMC Sports Center. An added bonus, this location would provide a significant "wow factor" for people entering the campus via the main entrance drive on the west side just off U.S. Highway 2. A working timeline calls for this planning to take place over the next several months with the goal to have design development finalized by late 2014. Development of construction documents would be completed over the winter, and bidding would take place in February and March 2015. With that done, the project would move forward with excavation as soon as weather permits in the spring and continue into 2016. The ultimate goal is to open the new facility in time for use by students who arrive for the fall 2016 academic term. In addition to finalizing the plans, staff members in UMC's Office of Development & Alumni Relations will continue to build on the initial work they have done to identify organizations and individual donors who may be interested in contributing to the additional \$5 million in funding for the entire project. Corby Kemmer, director of development, says, "We look forward to this challenge, and we've already identified some prospective donors. That said, a transformational project like this requires transformational levels of private investment." Kemmer says he has worked with the U of M and the Crookston campus to develop a case statement which details the scope of the project as well as opportunities for levels of investment, such as naming rights. Individuals who may be interested in speaking with him regarding this may contact Kemmer directly at 218-281-8434.

Initial Plans

Last year, as UMC's Wellness Center was added to the priority list for the University of Minnesota system, some initial planning occurred. The project will total \$15 million, with \$10 million from the state and \$5 million raised from other sources. Plans call for a building of approximately 36,000 square feet featuring a two-court recreational gymnasium space, workout and fitness spaces, locker rooms, public spaces, a classroom, and a multipurpose room. As the third largest employer in the region, the U of M Crookston has full intention to make sure the Wellness Center not only benefits the campus, but also that it becomes an asset to the region. In Crookston and the surrounding community, it will provide another local venue for activities when not used by UMC students. Plans do not call for it to serve as a health club with memberships. The last building on the Crookston campus funded by state bonding dollars was the Sargeant Student Center, which was completed in the fall of 2005. That facility has proven to be indispensable to the campus as well as the community as it has become an important host site for numerous campus and community events.

History and Need

Originally built in 1930 when the campus was a residential high school, the current recreational facility, the UMC Sports Center, has been significantly updated only once--in 1980 when Lyasker Gymnasium was added along with some additional office space and training rooms. The central core of the facility, Knutson Gymnasium, is more than 80 years old and houses the current fitness and exercise area. The Sports Center is shared by varsity athletics, intramural sports, and the student body. Because of the need for student-athletes to use the facility for conditioning, practice and training, it is overcrowded and virtually inaccessible to most other students. In addition to overcrowding and age, the inadequate size of the UMC Sports Center has meant limited space for equipment--there are only 15 cardio machines and a small weight room for a campus population of roughly 1000. Winters, especially those like this past year's severely cold and long winter, make it difficult if not impossible for students to exercise outdoors for much of the academic year, and the need is great for students to have access to healthy recreation year-round. Studies indicate that college wellness facilities have a positive impact on successful student persistence, grade point average, and graduation rates. These studies also show that habits related to wellness directly impact lifelong health and are connected to a stronger workforce. In addition, the Wellness Center will help enhance academic programs such as UMC's sport and recreation management, and develop new opportunities to meet workforce needs for training in the areas of health and wellness.

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